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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005812

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: THAILAND: WHO'S IN CHARGE? WHAT'S NEXT?

REF: BANGKOK 2988

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The "Council for Democratic Reform under the Monarchy" is in control of the government after a bloodless coup on the evening of September 19. The CDRM promises to cede control to an interim civilian government soon, and civil society contacts we spoke to today believed this would happen. Politicians and academics have expressed support for the military's actions, believing that there was "no other way" to proceed with political reform free of the control of Prime Minister's Thaksin's enormous wealth and political power. This is a sad commentary on the weak state of Thailand's democratic institutions. The fight appears to have gone out of Thaksin, at least for now, in light of the complete collapse of any support for him in the military. We are following up on reports that some leading Thai Rak Thai members are being held in detention; others are out of the country and may be traveling to meet Thaksin. End Summary.

12. (C) As of COB on 9/20 the "Council for Democratic Reform under the Monarchy" (CDRM) has seized and maintained power in a so far bloodless coup. The leaders of the Committee are:

Supreme Commander Gen. Ruengroj Mahasaranond, Chairman  
Army Commander in Chief Sonthi Boonyaratklin, Leader  
Navy C-in-C Adm Sathiraphan Keyanon, First Deputy Leader  
Air Force C-in-C Air Chief Marshal Chalit Phukphasuk, Second Deputy Leader  
Police Commissioner General Kowit Watthana, Third Deputy Leader  
National Security Council SecGen Gen. Winai Phattiyakul, Secretary General

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COMMENT: Several things here are significant. The police are participating, despite the fact that PM Thaksin, as a former policeman, was considered a police ally. We have heard that police commander Gen. Kowit told his colleagues that he was not a member of the coup conspiracy, but he knew about it and went along with it. Also significant is the participation of Supreme Commander Ruengroj. In Thaksin's effort from New York on 9/19, to stem the tide against him, he was relying on the Supreme Commander to rally the troops loyal to the PM and oppose the coup. We believe that Ruengroj's "defection" was a factor in Thaksin's so far muted response to the coup. End comment

13. (C) The CDRM issued a steady stream of communiques overnight on 9/19-20, mostly couched in reassuring language. The statements reiterate that the generals have no intention to retain power, and plan to return the government to civilian control "as soon as possible." General Winai, who is on the Council, told the Ambassador last night that it might take a few days before the military would cede control to a civilian. During a briefing for the diplomatic corps (septel), Gen. Sonthi committed to the transfer within two weeks. (COMMENT: Speculation on a transitional PM centers on Privy Counselor Surayud (reftel) and Bank of Thailand governor Pridyathorn -- presumably to send a strong positive signal on the economy.)

14. (C) The CDRM statements also contain elements that cause concern. It has forbidden the assembly of more than five people "for a political purpose." (We understand that the police are interpreting that as forbidding assembly for any purpose.) It also ordered the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology to 'control and block' all network information that affects the administration of the CDRM. (CNN and BBC news services on the one cable TV provider were off for most of last night and today, but appear to be back on again.)

BANGKOK REJOICES

15. (C) Post has spoken to a range of contacts in Bangkok about the coup. PAO academic contacts could only be described as ebullient. They gave a variety of justifications for the army's move, alleging that Thaksin had

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deliberately incited problems in the South to strengthen his political position, for example, and even claiming he was behind the bomb attacks in Hat Yai. One said that army was only reacting to the "coup" already staged by Thaksin, a reference to what is seen as his anti-democratic ruling style. They all felt that the coup was inevitable and it was good that it happened while Thaksin was out of the country.

16. (C) Political party contacts were more restrained in their response. They recognized that it "looked bad" for Thailand to have a military coup, and they regretted it. But both the Democrat Party spokesman and a leading Chart Thai member gave essentially the same response: what else was there to do? Thaksin's enormous wealth made him unbeatable in elections. He had emasculated the Constitution's checks and balances. Both emphasized the importance of looking forward. Polcouns asked both whether they were concerned that the military might try to keep hold of the power it seized. Both expressed confidence that the military would return power to civilian government quickly. The Democrat spokesman added that elections would not take place this November, but that the elections held sometime next year would be fairer, and this was the key thing. One pointed to the jovial atmosphere on the streets, which we have also noticed. People are having their pictures taken with the tanks, and for the most part, getting on with their normal lives. They are relieved, not afraid.

THAI RAK THAI -- WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

17. (C) The Ambassador spoke with Thai Amb. Virasakdi in New York about 1 p.m. Bangkok time Thaksin and associates were awaiting overflight clearance for Canada and Greenland en route to London. Family members will join in London after coming from various places. Virasakdi said Thaksin was in a reflective mood now. He knew it was over when he learned that Supreme Commander Ruengroj was part of the audience last night. Thaksin looks forward to taking break and then

possibly returning to Thailand in low-key fashion at some point in not-too-distant future. He was &somewhat relieved8 that as result of coup, he won,t be in a position to "disappoint the rural poor who were counting on him.8 Thaksin had spoken with Gen. Winai in recent hours; Thaksin had expressed concern that his &property8 in Chiang Mai would be vandalized. Gen. Winai assured him not to worry.

¶8. (C) A number of Thaksin's ministers and associates appear to have been out of the country at the time of the coup. The Ambassador confirmed that two of them - Deputy PM Chidchai and Secretary to the PM's office Prommin -- have been detained by the authorities, reportedly at Army HQ. Ambassador expressed concern about them to Gen. Winai, who gave assurances that they were well. (We have also followed up on reports that members of the opposition People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) were being detained. According to PAD leaders, these reports are not true.)

COMMENT

¶9. (C) Many of Bangkok's opinion shapers seem willing to accept a coup and a brief period of military rule in exchange for a clean slate and a chance at new round of political reforms and elections free of the specter of Thaksin's overwhelming wealth and power. This is a very sad commentary on the state of Thailand's democratic institutions. The one bright spot on the landscape is the widespread view that the military will quickly cede power to a civilian government, and that it will proceed with constitutional reform and elections without delay. The upbeat atmosphere here will quickly turn nasty if the military does not keep that promise.

BOYCE